



Network News

Your Arizona Parent School Connection

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Look What's New!

by Barb Ross

The 2006-2007 school year is off and running! The Parent Information Network is pleased to announce the new PIN Specialist for Cochise, Graham and Greenlee counties, Suzanne Roelike. Originally from Minnesota, Suzanne moved to Phoenix with her husband, Tim, in 1989. They have two children; ages 11 and 9. They moved to Tucson in 2000. Since then, she has been active as PTA and site council president in her local school district. Please join us in welcoming Suzanne to our team!

For the first time in the history of this unique project, we now have eight full time parent consultants to serve and support parents across the state of Arizona!

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In the 'PINC'

by Tina Swearingen

With the new school year comes a complete overhaul of the Parent Information Network Clearinghouse, more commonly referred to as the PINC. Revisions have been made to all PIN authored documents; IDEA 2004 resources have been updated; and new documents have been added. A few of the new resources focus on student self-advocacy. If interested in these resources, you can ask for them by name, GR03 "Child Friendly Websites", IE03 "How to Get the Most Out of Your

Child's IEP: Kids as Self-Advocates", and TR10 "Self-Evaluation Checklist." Probably the most well known and widely used PINC resource is GR07 "Blue Pages: Disability Related Resources." The Blue Pages contain directory information on local, state, and national resources which are easily utilized by parents and professionals alike. The entire Clearinghouse is available free on CD, which also includes the Blue Pages. To request the above resources or a copy of the CD, please contact your regional PIN Specialist.

Assistive Technology in Arizona

by Christine Opitz

The new Assistive Technology (AT) Director at the Arizona Department of Education, Exceptional Student Services (ADE/ESS), froma Cummings, radiates enthusiasm that is contagious. She is passionate about sharing the mission of this new project and the details of the various components of a comprehensive program designed to provide training and technical assistance to improve the type and scope of services provided to students with disabilities in Arizona. The AT Specialists and their Director are anxious to get the word out about the trainings and services that they have to offer. Below is a brief description of some of the trainings and services that are available from the AT team.

Cornerstone Trainings – These trainings are one-day sessions on topics that must be universally understood and applied to ensure consistent, high quality use of technology statewide in Arizona. Sessions are developed and presented by invited speakers and ADE/ESS AT team members and will increase knowledge and skills.

Hot Topics - These are short focused sessions delivered on-site in response to specific district and regional needs. Sessions are developed and presented by ADE/ESS AT team members.

Power Up for Learning – These sessions will provide hands-on instruction in the operation and application of specific AT tools. Sessions will be developed and provided by ADE/ESS AT team members and vendors.

Tech for Learning – Trainings for administrators, educators, related service personnel, and parents involved in the school environment are available throughout the current school year. The Tech for Learning trainings, six in all, are designed to increase understanding of how assistive technology, Universal Design Learning (UDL), and Educational Technology can

be used throughout the curriculum. You can find a detailed listing of these training opportunities by clicking on “Calendar of Events” online at www.azed.gov/ess.

Tech for Learning Communities – Public education agencies (PEAs) that sign up to participate in the Tech for Learning Communities (TLCs) are provided with capacity building training in both assistive technology and universal design learning. The ADE/ESS AT Specialists provide coaching and mentoring assistance to TLCs throughout the school year while they begin to use the newly learned strategies with their students across different educational settings.

Technical Assistance: JUST IN TIME! – The ADE/ESS AT team will make every effort to respond to your questions about AT selection, acquisition and usage within 24 hours. You can contact them by phone, email, or in person as your questions arise about topics including, but not limited to:

- ❖ Tech for Learning Communities Support
- ❖ Site visits
- ❖ Consultation regarding items from the loan library
- ❖ Miscellaneous questions about assistive technology, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS).

The concept of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) meets the needs of diverse learners by providing multiple learning formats for all children. Classroom materials are universally designed to offer many ways of learning a single concept. Another acronym that parents may encounter is the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS). Core instructional materials available in the NIMAS file format are able to be read by text readers or other assistive technology software for persons with print disabilities. The national center established to host these files is the National Instructional Materials Access Center or NIMAC. For more information about UDL and NIMAS you can visit the CAST website at <http://nimas.cast.org>. If you are looking for information about NIMAC, go to www.nimac.us.

Ask an AT Specialist – One of the most exciting elements of the Assistive Technology unit is the “Ask an AT Specialist.” Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. an AT Specialist is available to answer AT or UDL questions and provide callers with information about future training opportunities. You can “Ask an AT Specialist” by calling 1-800-352-4558.

The Assistive Technology Specialists welcome inquiries from parents regarding the training and services they offer. Program details can be found online at www.azed.gov/ess/at. The Parent Information Network Clearinghouse document SE22 “AT Ideas” contains eleven pages of assistive technology ideas. The ideas range from low tech to high tech and are organized in an easy to read format. They are available online at www.azed.gov/ess/pinspals.

Christine Opitz is a member of the ADE/ESS AT team. For more information, please visit the ADE/ESS AT website at www.azed.gov/ess/at or call the ESS desk at 602-542-4013.

The PINS/PALS Initiative: Past and Present

by Sharon Moeller and Kristie Melkers

Partners are Liaisons to Schools (PALS) are parents of children who receive special education services or individuals from community agencies who provide support to families who have a child with a disability. PALS work jointly with Parent Information Network Specialists (PINS) to provide an extension of support and information to other parents, school staff, and their communities regarding special education or disability-related issues.

The PALS program began 18 years ago in an effort to enhance leadership opportunities for parents of children receiving special education services. Since then, there have been countless achievements resulting from the PINS/PALS initiative. By bringing together the valuable insights, innovative ideas, and common interests of parents, schools, and the community, new resources have been made available to families and communities. The network of meaningful support so vital to everyone has become more complete as each project reached its completion over the years.

PINS/PALS collaborations have resulted in:

- creation of a five question survey to assist parents with their IEP
- development of special education resource shelves in schools and community resource centers
- hosting of parents’ rights workshops
- joint trainings for parents and professionals
- presentations to school district governing boards
- hosting of parent forums on parent-selected topics
- development of a volunteer awards program
- formation/strengthening of district-wide parent groups

For the 2006-2007 school year, there are currently 28 active PALS in our state. This impressive number reflects the increased emphasis on parental involvement and support fostered by meaningful home/school partnerships and other programs that offer opportunities for developing leadership skills among parents of students who have a disability.

Parents who are interested in being considered for a district PALS appointment should contact their school district’s special education director to discuss possible collaboration through this program. Regional PIN Specialists are happy to meet with you and your special education director to explain the program and its benefits. School districts who are interested in learning more about the PINS/PALS initiative or who would like to nominate a parent to serve as a PALS member may contact their regional PIN Specialist for more information. In our effort to build a vast network of support and referral for families, schools, and the community, staff

members who are affiliated with community organizations or agencies who would like to serve in this capacity may contact their regional PIN Specialist to discuss this opportunity.

Starting the School Year Off on the Right Foot

By Barb Ross

Getting started on the right foot can help make the journey more valuable for every one involved in your child's education. One of the first steps is often overlooked. Attend the school's Open House. Introduce yourself to your child's teacher(s); be friendly and courteous. Offer to help or get involved. Many parents have found that developing a "back to school" packet that introduces (i.e. strengths, likes and dislikes) your child to the teacher beneficial.

It is imperative that you are aware of how your child learns and how your child's disability will affect his future. It is very important to know your child's strengths as well as his needs. Learn about current research for 'best practices' in teaching a student with your child's disability.

Most importantly, know your rights and responsibilities. Be proactive; do not wait until there is a problem before learning your rights. Learn all you can about IDEA 2004. Learn all you can about the issues surrounding your child's disability. Learn the significant timelines associated with the special education process. Learn how to participate in the Individualized Education Program process.

Here is a tough one; be organized! Create and organize a home file. Examine all records relating to your child (i.e. school records, progress reports, evaluations and recommendations). Keep copies of all written communications or emails with the school and the originals you receive. Keep a dated communication log of incoming and outgoing phone calls. Come prepared for meetings.

Learn and practice effective communication. Use techniques like restating or rephrasing what was said to ensure clear understanding. Ask for clarification if you do not understand! Do not interrupt or ignore others while they are speaking or use negative body language. Express ideas openly and honestly, and be prepared with possible solutions. Make 'I' statements like, "I get confused with the use of acronyms I do not know" versus "You confuse me when you use acronyms."

Learn to advocate for your child. Remain calm and focused on the issues. Practice active listening skills and share your concerns early on. Most importantly, leave your emotions outside the meetings. Respect each member of the team and value their input. Remember to action plan before each meeting to assist with your participation in the IEP development.

Each district has a chain of command for resolving concerns and issues; become familiar with your district's policies.

Effective communication is essential to clarify the concerns and assist in the problem solving process.

In following the chain of command, first talk with your child's teacher regarding your questions and concerns. If you are not successful with having your questions or concerns addressed, make an appointment with the district's special education director or with the principal, or the director (charter school) of your child's school. If you still have concerns a meeting with the superintendent may be necessary. A follow up letter to the principal and superintendent is an excellent tool to help clarify the issues and express your concerns.

Another course of action to take when you have questions or concerns regarding your child's special education program is to request an IEP meeting. If you still are unable to resolve your concerns you may contact the Exceptional Student Services Program Specialist for your school district. If the concerns need outside assistance; use the formal options provided through the Arizona Department of Education which are Mediation, State Complaint and Due Process.

For more information contact the PIN Specialist in your area or visit the ADE website www.azed.gov/ess/dispute.

IDEA 2004 Regulations

by Teri Rademacher

No longer will we have to listen to the town crier say "The Regs are coming, the Regs are coming!" They have arrived! On August 3, 2006 the U. S. Department of Education announced the final regulations for Part B of IDEA 2004. The regulations are guidelines for implementing the Individual's with Disability Act (IDEA) reauthorized in 2004. They were published in the Federal Register for public access on August 14, 2006 and officially take affect on October 14th. You can view the official version online at <http://idea.ed.gov>.

Another, more user friendly, version can be found on the Wrightslaw website at www.wrightslaw.com/idea/law.htm. There is also a ten page document titled "Summary of Major Changes in the Regulations" available on that website. This document highlights the substantive changes in the regulations from those in the Notice of Proposed Rule Making (NPRM). The changes indicate that public input, whether in person, by phone, letter, fax, or e-mail, had an affect.

The arrival of the regulations was much anticipated and now that they are here, the real work begins. Schools will be spending the next months determining what changes will need to be made to their policies and procedures to align with the new regulations. Be sure to watch the Arizona Department of Education's website and future issues of *Network News* for trainings on the new regulations in your area. If you have questions or for more information, contact the PIN Specialist in your area.

ANNOUNCEMENTS**Arizona Parent Satisfaction Survey**

IDEA 2004 requires Exceptional Student Services to annually report data on the percent of parents with a child receiving special education services who report that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities.

Public education agencies (PEAs) that have an enrollment of 50,000 students or are in year 2 or year 4 in the 2006-2007 school year are required to use this survey. Log on to www.ade.az.gov/ess and click *What's New* to view a sample survey and see which PEAs are currently participating in the survey. If you are a parent of a child with a disability in one of these school districts, you will be given a confidential user ID and password by your district in order to complete the survey. For more information contact PIN/Child Find Coordinator: Becky Raabe, (928) 679-8106, or becky.raabe@azed.gov.

EAPN

The Enhancing Arizona's Parent Networks website, www.azeapn.org, offers parents and professionals disability-related information and support, a calendar of training and conference events, and articles to foster parent participation and leadership. Bookmark this site. You'll be sure to come back often to find out what's going on in Arizona.

Name or Address Change?

Network News goes out to over 4,000 parents, service providers and schools. We need to continuously update our mailing list to stay current. If you have any changes to your name or address, please let us know. We would also like to know if you are a parent, provider, or educator. To update your information, please contact your Regional PIN Specialist (listed on the front page) or call Carla Valenzuela at 602-542-3852.

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